EUROPA-UNIVERSITÄT VIADRINA FRANKFURT (ODER)

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European
New School
of Digital
Studies

Political Parties in the Digital Era

Welcome to the course Political Parties in the Digital Era. I have designed this syllabus to help you understand which topic and important questions we will consider in each week's class. I recommend that you use this document each week prior to undertaking the readings.

Information

Class:	Political Parties in the Digital Era
Term:	Summer Semester 2023 (SoSe2023)
Seminar:	Wednesdays 14:00–16:00 Room: CP 18
Office Hours:	Virtual (Zoom), by appointment, email to arrange.
Me:	Dr. Mike Cowburn (he/him)
Email:	cowburn@europa-uni.de
TA:	Felix Trojan (trojan@europa-uni.de)
You:	Who you are isn't defined by records or bureaucracies, so if you prefer a name or a pronoun other than the one listed, please let me know.

Communication

For short questions, email is the best way to contact me. I endeavor to respond to all emails within twenty-four hours Monday to Friday, I will respond to most emails considerably quicker than this. If I haven't responded within twenty-four hours, please feel free to email again.

If you wish to get help on term papers, go over material covered in class, talk about connections between class material and other ideas, and so on, I will be happy to schedule time in my virtual office hours. Please email me to arrange. These discussions are generally student-led but I can help you formulate questions and point you in the direction of additional material for your term papers based on my sense of your strengths and interests. I really encourage you to take advantage of this time and I will be flexible enough to accommodate most appointments.

I also encourage students to take advantage of my office hours to ask questions or discuss issues related to the course, the discipline of political science, or academia more

generally. If you have any comments about or problems with the course itself, I encourage you to share them in my office hours.

Content

Political parties are vital in any democracy and have undergone significant transformation in advanced democracies in the digital era. In this course we will investigate the roles and responsibilities of parties in the recent years. We will explore concepts such as partisanship, questioning whether the institutions of political parties are contributing to or alleviating current tensions in modern democracies. We will consider theoretical and empirical defenses and critiques of the institutions and behaviors of parties as political actors. We will also consider how parties engage with and are shaped by their interactions with other political actors.

Throughout the semester, our focus on political parties in the digital era will highlight how technological changes have impacted political parties, especially in shaping how they attempt to communicate with (potential) voters. More broadly, we will analyze how parties contribute to and reflect wider trends in society, including narratives around partisanship as a form of identity in the twenty-first century. We will read competing theories which attempt to explain the changing role of partisanship. Further, we will engage with the (re)emerging sub-field focused on intra-party factions, considering how internal party divisions relate to inter-party trends. Everyone is welcome to participate in this class as this course has no prerequisites, though a general interest in the subject of party politics is expected. If you don't like politics, this class probably isn't for you!

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

This course will provide you with an advanced-level understanding of party politics in the modern era. We will focus on a set of academic works that frequently speak to each other, meaning that by the end of this course you will understand the divergent positions of notable authors in this field. Throughout the semester, we will engage in the study of parties and analyze different conceptions of partisanship with some time dedicated to discussing the broader implications of what we learn. This course strives to spark interest and curiosity in the topic by considering the role of political parties in relation to events we observe both historically and in the news today. The course has been designed to deeply engage students in

the topic within political science and political communication while considering implications beyond these disciplines.

Following the successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Define what political parties are and what they do.
- Understand political parties in a comparative perspective.
- Connect theories about what political parties are to current trends.
- Appreciate how digital transformation has affected the communication strategy and identity of major parties across North America and Western Europe.
- Understand how parties engage with other actors in the political system.
- Understand how partisanship is shaped by questions of identity and ideology.
- Make normative arguments about the role of partisanship in modern democracies.
- Understand how intra-party dynamics impact parties.

Course Requirements

Students can take this class either for partial (3 ECTS) or full (9 ECTS) credit. All students will contribute work during the semester, those students who want full credit for the class will also write a term paper.

Attendance, participation, and preparedness are important to your success in this course (and, I find, in life generally). Therefore, it is expected that you will come to each class prepared, having read, and thought about the course material, and ready to engage in discussion. You should be prepared to discuss the topic and consider arguments from multiple perspectives, including the authors' and your own. Put simply, **you are expected to have something to say about the readings**.

Students can choose to take this class for partial or full credit, the requirements for each are as follows. Students taking the class for full credit will also complete requirements for partial credit.

Partial Credit

All students should come to each class able to contribute something to our discussion **having *actively* read the texts each week**. For each text you should be able to articulate the following prior to the week's class.

- What problem or gap is this work addressing?

- What is the research question? What method(s) does the author use to answer the research question?
- What is the theoretical argument? What is the empirical finding?
- How does this text relate to other readings in our class?

I encourage you to bring not only your ideas about but also your struggles with the readings to class. If something in a reading doesn't make sense to you then I encourage you to raise this during class so we can investigate together. If you don't understand something, there are likely many other students in the class who are also struggling on the same point!

All students will select **two weeks where they serve on a discussion panel** of one or two students. The role of the discussion panel is to advance our understanding of the assigned texts during our in-class sessions. Though I expect everyone to do the reading every week, students should prepare particularly thoroughly for their discussion panel weeks. Students in the discussion panel will be expected to provide further clarification, commentary, and explanations of the texts. In addition, the discussion panel should expect to be called on to answer questions. When class discussions are lively, the additional workloads on discussants should be minimal, providing an incentive for everyone to participate actively throughout the semester. Discussants may wish to meet outside of class during their discussion week to further their understanding of their texts. If discussion panels have areas of their texts that they would like us to focus on, they should let me know prior to class. If discussion panels wish to meet with me outside of our regularly scheduled class, I am very willing to do that. Discussion panels do not need to give a presentation of the readings but should come prepared with a detailed knowledge of all the texts in their week.

Please indicate your preferred weeks to be on the discussion panel by following this link: https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NRXtDiqTv6l5uIEhBY3. You are expected to sign up for at least two sessions by our second session (Wednesday 26th April). If you wish to remain in the class beyond this date and have not signed up for two discussion panels you will be assigned to two discussion panels.

Finally, all students will **write a proposal for a conference paper**, we will discuss the requirements of this proposal during our first session. **Conference papers must be sent to me via email before class starts on Wednesday 14th June**, the week prior to this deadline will be a reading week to ensure you have enough time to complete this work. Those of you taking the class for partial credit only will not write the paper, only the proposal. For

those of you taking the class for full credit (see below) it likely makes sense to write a proposal for your anticipated term paper, but this can change later.

Full Credit

All requirements for active participation plus **a final term paper** (5,000 words or more). **Final papers are due on September 27th**, and late papers will not be accepted without agreement prior to this date. **Term papers should be sent to me via email**.

Term papers can be written on any topic that we engage with during our course. You are unlimited in regional scope, meaning you may write about parties in any country or geography of your choosing. Your term paper must be connected to the concept of political parties in the digital era, but beyond this you are free to choose your own research question and to follow your own research design. Term papers may use quantitative or qualitative methods and may be empirical or theoretical in nature. In short you are free to conduct your study using whichever tools and methods with which you are familiar, with no restrictions other than it must relate to the topics or themes discussed during our class. Many of these themes will focus on political parties in democratic countries, you may choose to focus on political parties in non-democratic countries provided you consider about how the topics we discuss apply differently given the systemic constraints.

Term papers should be submitted using a consistent and recognized citation style of your choosing, citation management software will make this easier (see below). You must cite all sources of information, quotations or ideas which are not your own. Do not copy and paste text from the internet into your papers and attempt to pass it off as your own writing. You may not turn in a paper that someone else has written or that you have bought or downloaded. Any use of automated text language models such as ChatGPT must be declared.

Grading Schema

Grades will be calculated using the following metrics.

Partial Credit (3 ECTS):

- In person contributions (discussion panel & oral participation in class): **50%**
- Conference paper proposal: **50%**

Full Credit (9 ECTS):

- In person contributions (discussion panel & oral participation in class): **15%**
- Conference paper proposal: **15%**
- Term paper: **70%**

Civility Policy

In accordance with the philosophy of an institution for higher learning, the classroom should be a place where diverse ideas can be explored with respect to promote learning and growth. We each come from a variety of backgrounds and bring with us different experiences to the classroom. Regardless of whether we share similar opinions and beliefs, I expect us to remain respectful of each other as we explore ideas. I encourage and expect you to express yourself with reason, clarity, courtesy, and compassion. This ensures that we may be comfortable learning and growing without fear of judgment, ridicule, or intimidation. I welcome each of you as worthy contributors in the classroom. **Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated**. Similarly, if any student feels unsafe or discriminated against during in the class, please contact me immediately. While academic discourse should be intellectually challenging, it should never be discriminatory, and **it is my responsibility to ensure everyone feels safe and able to participate in our classroom**.

In the same spirit, we should adopt inclusive language both in our discussions and written work. In line with recent style guide changes from the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and others, students should capitalize "Black" when describing this racial group in their written work. "White" should also have a capital letter, in line with recommendations of the National Association of Black Journalists, except when it is an adjective (white nationalism etc.). Similarly, we should use terms that acknowledge the humanity of people we are discussing, recognizing that individuals are not defined by their conditions or circumstances; for example, "enslaved people," not "slaves." Gender neutral terms should be used both in discussions and written work, so "member of Congress" not "congressman." **Racist, sexist, homophobic, or any other offensive terms will not be tolerated in the classroom, regardless of the context in which they are used**. More generally, we should reflect upon our positionality as researchers in our contributions. If students have specific feedback on any of these points that they wish to discuss I welcome these conversations either directly or as part of our wider class discussions.

Prior Knowledge & Resources

Though there are no formal prerequisites for this course, this is an MA level course meaning some familiarity with the study of politics and political science as a discipline is expected. In addition, this is not a methods class, meaning we will not engage in the process of *how* to produce academic work in political science. I appreciate some students may have backgrounds in other disciplines and so have the following recommendations for students with concerns in any of these areas. **These resources are all free of charge to access**:

- If you have questions about the research process and writing academic papers, I recommend Leanne C. Powner's *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide.* The book provides a detailed walkthrough of each step in the research process and serves as an excellent guide for writing a research paper.
- Many of the texts we will read in this class use regression analysis, a basic familiarity with regression and statistical reasoning will help you read these papers. For an introduction to the subject, I recommend the YouTube video series by zedstatistics on regression. For a more in-depth understanding of statistical analysis and econometrics, I recommend Nick Huntington-Klein's *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*, available for free online.
- If you are unsure about language and style for your term paper please refer to the most recent APSA Style Manual for Political Science from page 10 onwards.
- Citation management: I **strongly** recommend downloading and installing citation management software at the start of the course to manage the readings and your notes as this will make citation for your term paper much easier. Multiple free resources are available, I recommend Zotero, but citavi and Mendeley are popular alternatives. You should also install the browser plug-in with your chosen citation management tool for ease of adding resources to your library. **I promise this will make your life easier!**

Course Structure

Below is our schedule for the semester, depending on our progress through the course we may choose to expand or reduce certain sections. In such a scenario I will inform you of any changes sufficiently in advance. Each week we have one ninety-minute session, though I will bring some content and a framework within which to discuss ideas, these sessions are seminars rather than lectures so the ideas we will be discussing will be yours rather than mine. I am keen to hear your thoughts on the texts we will read with my role being to facilitate these discussions.

Each week that we have a class (except the first) has two mandatory readings which are shown in the bullet points below. In the middle of the semester we will have a reading

week with a Q&A session over Zoom. The conference abstracts are due the following week. All readings will be uploaded to Moodle at the start of the semester. If you are unable to locate a text, please ask your fellow students first but then feel free to email me.

Wednesday 19th April 2023 – Introduction (Virtual)

Expectations

Discussion of Syllabus

This session will take place virtually over Zoom due to the transport issues between Berlin and Frankfurt:

https://europa-uni-de.zoom.us/j/88028614748?pwd=VWlFeGk3OVN4eHRMT3k2ZmZZRXdNQT09

Wednesday 26th April 2023 – Discussion Panel Signup Deadline

https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NRXnOzz1Bi37e3gjm6q

Wednesday 26th April 2023 – Political Parties

What are political parties?

How can we classify different types of party democracies?

- R. S. Katz and P. Mair (1995). "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party". *Party Politics* 1(1): 5–28.
- S. C. Stokes (1999). "Political Parties and Democracy". *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(1):243-267.

Wednesday 3rd May 2023 – Representative Democracy

How do parties help democracies function?

Why do parties form?

- A.-K. Kölln (2015). "The Value of Political Parties to Representative Democracy". *European Political Science Review.* 7(4): 593–613.
- K. Bawn et al. (2012). "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics.* 10(3): 571-597.

Wednesday 10th May 2023 – Parties & Electoral Competition

What goals do parties and politicians pursue?

How do those goals structure party competition in elections?

- K. Strøm (1990). "A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties". *American Journal of Political Science.* 34(2): 565–598.
- D. E. Stokes (1963). "Spatial Models of Party Competition". *American Political Science Review.* 57(2): 368–377.

Wednesday 17ᵗʰ May 2023 – Governments & Coalitions

How do we distinguish types of government coalitions?

Why do parties join a coalition?

- I. Sagarzazu and H. Klüver (2017). "Coalition governments and party competition: Political communication strategies of coalition parties." *Political Science Research and Methods.* 5(2): 333-349.
- S. D. Fisher and S. B. Hobolt (2010). "Coalition government and electoral accountability." *Electoral Studies.* 29(3): 358-369.

Wednesday 24ᵗʰ May 2023 – Party Systems

What groups can we put parties into? Do these groups still make sense?

How do institutional features structure party competition?

- S. Mainwaring and E. Zoco (2007). "Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition: Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies." *Party Politics.* 13(2): 155-178.
- H. Kitschelt (2018), "Party Families and Political Ideologies" Oxford Research Encyclopedias. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.626

Wednesday 31ˢᵗ May 2023 – Challenger Parties

How do established parties react to challenger parties or new parties?

What happens when populist parties enter parliament?

- H. Klüver and J.-J. Spoon (2020). "Helping or Hurting? How Governing as a Junior Coalition Partner Influences Electoral Outcomes." *The Journal of Politics.* 82(4): 231–242.
- T. Abou-Chadi and W. Krause (2020). "The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach". *British Journal of Political Science.* 50(3): 829–847.

Wednesday 7ᵗʰ June 2023 – Reading Week, Virtual Q & A

Half way through our course, we will have a reading week instead of our usual class. In our usual class time I will host a Q&A session over Zoom for you to collectively ask questions about the course, the assignments, and the weeks ahead.

https://europa-uni-de.zoom.us/j/84148891909?pwd=TXBBVXJiSVBraldjVXUvd3BkNThKZz09

Wednesday 14ᵗʰ June – Conference Abstracts Due

Wednesday 14ᵗʰ June 2023 – Representation

What is the 'democratic mandate'?

How can we measure campaign promises/pledges? Do parties fulfil their promises?

What are problems associated with representative politics?

What other forms of participation exist? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

How can these alternative forms of participation supplement representative democracy?

- J. Mansbridge (2003). "Rethinking Representation". *American Political Science Review* 97(4): 515–528.
- R. Thomson, T. J. Royed, E. Naurin, J. Artés, R. Costello, L. Ennser-Jedenastik, M. Ferguson, P.Kostadinova, C. Moury, F. Pétry, and K. Praprotnik (2017). "The Fulfillment of Parties' Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Power Sharing". *American Journal of Political Science* 61(3): 527–542.

Wednesday 21st June 2023 – Party Positions & Issue Salience

What are differences between positions, salience, and issue ownership?

How can we measure latent policy positions?

What are methodological difficulties when measuring party positions?

- M. Laver (2014). "Measuring Policy Positions in Political Space". *Annual Review of Political Science.* 17: 207–223.
- I. Budge (2015). "Issue Emphases, Saliency Theory and Issue Ownership: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis". *West European Politics* 38(4): 761–777

Wednesday 28th June 2023 – Responsiveness

What is democratic responsiveness?

Do parties and parties and politicians react to public opinion? Should political actors change

their positions and policies depending on citizens' preferences?

- S. N. Soroka and C. Wlezien (2019). "Tracking the Coverage of Public Policy in Mass Media". *Policy Studies Journal.* 47(2): 471–491.
- H. Klüver and J.-J. Spoon (2016). "Who Responds? Voters, Parties and Issue Attention". *British Journal of Political Science.* 46(3): 633–654.

Wednesday 5th July 2023 – Voters

Are voters rational decision-makers, as assumed in many theories of representation?

Under what circumstances do voters behave (ir)rationally? What are consequences of irrational

voting behavior on political processes and decisions?

- J. Aldrich (1993). "Rational Choice and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science.* 37(1): 246-78.
- L. Stephens-Dougan (2021). "The Persistence of Racial Cues and Appeals in American Elections." *The Annual Review of Political Science.* 24: 301-320.

Wednesday 12th July 2023 – Intra-Party Divisions

What features matter for internal party conflict?

How do parties resolve internal disputes?

- A. J. Clarke (2020). "Party Sub-Brands and American Party Factions." *American Journal of Political Science.* 64(3): 452-470.
- M. Basedau and P.Köllner (2005). "Factionalism in Political Parties: An Analytical Framework for Comparative Studies." SSRN Working Paper. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=909172

Wednesday 19th July 2023 – Digital Democracy & the Media

How does the internet change democratic decision making and representation?

Do politicians and parties react to online discussions?

- G. King, B. Schneer, and A. White (2017). "How the News Media Activate Public Expression and Influence National Agendas." *Science.* 358(6364): 776–780.
- A. Guess, J. Nagler, and J. A. Tucker (2019). "Less Than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook". *Science Advances.* 5(1)

Wednesday 26th July 2023 – Political Parties in the Digital Era

How have party organizations changed in the digital era?

Are we in an era of party decline or party renewal?

- B. Kalsnes (2016). "The Social Media Paradox Explained: Comparing Political Parties' Facebook Strategy Versus Practice." *Social Media & Society.* 2(2)
- A. Chadwick & J. Stromer-Galley (2016). "Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns: Party Decline or Party Renewal?" *The International Journal of Press/Politics.* 21(3): 283-293.

Wednesday 27th September – Final Term Papers Due